

Grinnell, E. and J. California Thrasher.

(1901)

A-G [Grinnell,
E. + J.]
Thrasher
1901

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the fashion known to all nations as the most thorough and most cleansing.

Lo stays there longer than his white brother could possibly endure those clouds of uprising hot vapor; so long that you fall to wondering if he may not have succumbed to that suffocating heat.

But no; after a long, a very long time, there is a movement of the blanketed doorway, and there emerges a bronze statue, a statue glistening like polished copper; Lo comes forth shining with the perspiration that has cleansed every pore. There is a rush to the creek's edge—a plunge into its deepest pool (ice-cold from the melted snows that go toward its filling), and when Lo comes forth his body is all aglow from the quickened blood that now courses through his veins, and made fresh-skinned and clean by a bath that knows no betters.

"Dirty as a Piute?" Lo, I beg your pardon!

Humboldt, Nev.

THE CALIFORNIA THRASHER.

BY ELIZABETH AND JOSEPH GRINNELL.



BIRD in the hand is *not* worth two in the bush, as any one can see by the indignation in his eye and the contempt of his whole attitude. However, if one can manage to pick up a California Thrasher and subject him to the inquisition of the camera for just one minute for the express purpose of giving his photograph to the LAND OF SUNSHINE readers, he makes a pretty fair picture.

In the attempt to make him roost upon the finger against his will, the long legs of this notorious runner are invisible, but this disadvantage is more than offset by the full evidence of his magnificent beak, which is as strong as it is gracefully curved. The upper parts of this bird are a uniform dark, brownish grey, tail slightly darker than the back; throat whitish; breast, brownish grey, merging into the pale cinnamon brown of the belly, while the beak is black. He impresses one as well dressed, even to the tip of his long black toes. Nature's own devotee is he, for he scorns the habitations of man and all of man's cultivated lands, though it is believed that an individual of such agricultural tendencies as himself will one day become the California ranchers' sworn and affectionate ally. At present

his home is always in the chaparral. From the Sacramento Valley to California's southernmost hem this thrasher is abundant. His highest perch may be the topmost twig of a buckthorn, or the tapering finger of a scrub oak, not a high pedestal to be sure, but it answers the purpose of a stage for the little singer. And how he sings! His notes are variable, being composed of snatches of borrowed music, and yet so soft and beautiful that they seem distinctly his own. He sings on for hours, especially in the early morning, without regard to breakfast, until he feels the pangs of hunger, such pangs no doubt being accentuated by the faint movement of the dry leaves under the perch of the singer. And then the musician becomes the common drudge for daily bread, the "Adam in the garden," the ordinary farmer who must grub for a living. And he knows where and how to make the best of the situation. If it were possible to domesticate the California Thrasher it would rival the farmyard fowls in a raid on the pansy beds; for of all birds that love to scratch and dig in loose light soil, the thrasher would take the medal. His long, curved bill was made on purpose to investigate the retreat of grub and larvæ, and woe be to any insect of edible virtue which comes within his reach! He digs holes in the ground just for fun, if there be no food in sight, and would no doubt bore for oil, were it not that he is neither a capitalist nor a broker. In captivity this inclination to dig holes in something with his marvelous beak still is his, and so he is given a stale loaf of bread wherein he pecks to his heart's content. A break in the plastering on the wall once discovered, the bird never forgets its exact location and keeps on at his "calling." With him the instinct that treasure is always buried has made him almost a genius.

During July and August the thrasher moults and then only is his voice unheard. After breakfast, and his usual exercise, he mounts to his twig again and sings. If interrupted by the approach of a stranger he does not fly but simply drops out of sight on the side of the bush or tree opposite the intruder.

If not followed, the bird runs along to the next bush, where he hops up through the foliage to the topmost twig and goes on with his music. If pursued, he does not take long flights, but runs swiftly, as only a road runner (besides himself) can run. Nor does he go over the tops of bushes, but around and between them, always keeping out of sight. If by lucky chance the observer does catch a glimpse of him, his body will be seen tilted slightly forward and his tail at an angle of 35° .

The California Thrasher nests as early as the hummer,

eggs being found from December until June. The eggs are three in number, not unlike those of the robin, but spotted with brown above the bright blue of the ground. The nests are not works of high art, for they consist of a platform of angular twigs, with a more neatly molded saucer-shaped lining of dry rootlets and horsehair. The nests are placed among the branches of bushes two or three feet above the ground. Though the bird is ordinarily a



THE CALIFORNIA THRASHER.

shy one, it can be almost touched when surprised on the nest; then she slips silently away and the intruder must wait a long while before he sees her again. Be he a true son of Mother Nature, he will bide his time in the shadow of the chaparral, even though he be late to camp and hungry for his supper; for well he knows she will return. And there is a fascination in the waiting.

Pasadena, Cal.

AN UNDESIRABLE IMMIGRANT.*

BY LUCY ROBINSON



IN describing the manners and customs of the mongoose, as I knew him in Jamaica, I shall try to treat with fairness that native of Hindostan; not forgetting to pay tribute to his marvelous courage, surpassing, it seems to me, that of any other animal not more than double his size.

Often from the veranda of our bungalow we watched him running along the bluff, resembling in color, shape, and leanness a common red squirrel, but, like the grey ground-squirrel of California, confining his exploits to *terra firma*.

On the other hand, his running, instead of a series of squirrel leaps, is a stealthy trot like the tread of a sober-minded cat, without loping or prancing. The mongoose moreover holds his bushy red tail straight out behind him, never letting it curl over his back like a squirrel's.

After we had once or twice observed the sharp-nosed, ferretlike animal furtively crossing the promontory below our rookery, we began to understand why the roosters, the hens and their broods so often in broad daylight came dashing back, as if panic-stricken, from the cliff overhanging the Caribbean. We understood why a handsome hen, that started out the day before with a dozen newly-hatched chickens, now had only eleven, the next day only nine, and so on, till of all her promising brood only a solitary chicken responded to her despairing cluck.

In taking up our abode at Savanna Point, on the north-east coast of Jamaica, we found ourselves in the heart of the original mongoose quarter; for it was at the estate immediately adjoining our lonely cocoanut walk that the animal was first introduced from India. In 1872, with a view to exterminating the cane-destroying rat, a native—somewhat imaginative—Jamaican, Hon. Bancroft Espeut, proprietor of Spring Garden estate, and a man of considerable ability, at one time member of the Legislative Council of the island, procured two pairs of mongooses, and turned them loose upon his plantation. Rats were doing serious mischief to young cocoanuts, by climbing the palm-trees and nibbling or breaking off the immature fruit. Girdling the trees with inverted tin pans failed to keep the rats from ascending; but it was thought that the mongoose, which does not shirk from an encounter with the Indian

* Apropos of an effort to introduce the mongoose in this State as a pest-destroyer.—ED.

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